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OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
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ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9164  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 6141  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0714  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0553  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0520  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
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RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J2 SEOUL KOR  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 SEOUL 002399  
SIPDIS  
SIPDIS  
NSC FOR CHA  
E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/18/2015  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [UN](#) [KS](#) [KN](#)  
SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER BAN'S UNSYG CAMPAIGN WEATHERING  
DPRK STORM  
REF: A. SEOUL 2000  
[1](#)B. SEOUL 1329  
[1](#)C. SEOUL 969  
[1](#)D. SEOUL 166  
[1](#)E. SEOUL 1034  
[1](#)F. SEOUL 509  
Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).  
SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (C) Five months into his official campaign for UN Secretary General, FM Ban continues to seek international SIPDIS support for his candidacy and to demonstrate his commitment to human rights and UN management reform. He reports no major opposition at this point, but is worried that without a sign of encouragement from the U.S., his candidacy could still falter. Ban hopes to gain from the perception that it is "Asia's turn" to fill the SYG post. Remaining hurdles include whether the North Korean issue further deteriorates on his watch, whether other Asian candidates enter the race and receive backing from P-5 members, and whether ROK-Japanese tensions play a significant role in blocking or undermining a regional consensus on his candidacy. COMMENT: A consummate diplomat, Ban finds himself at the top of his chosen career largely because of his ability to get along with others. While his staff emphasize his "reform" credentials, Ban has not had to deal with large-scale restructuring at the Ministry. However, Ban is among the most recognized of MOFAT's American experts, and seems naturally sympathetic to all things American. We have no doubt Ban's relations with the USG would be same if he were the UNSYG. END COMMENT AND SUMMARY.

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MAKING THE ROUNDS

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[1](#)2. (C) Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon has visited 14 of the 15 UNSC member countries this year and reports that he has received generally favorable results. The one remaining country is Japan, which is scheduled to chair the Security Council in October (see para 10). On multiple occasions, Ban has told the Ambassador that he perceived or heard strong private support from several UNSC members: Argentina, Congo, France, Ghana, Greece, Peru, Slovakia, and Tanzania (refs A-D). He recognized, however, that he needed to distinguish between "diplomatic niceness" and genuine shows of support. Most of his interlocutors have strongly supported an Asian for the next SYG, he reported.  
[1](#)3. (C) While Ban was accompanying President Roh Moo-hyun to Africa in March, Seoul announced that the ROK would increase

its Overseas Development Assistance to the continent from \$31 million to \$100 million by 2008. According to our Foreign Ministry contacts, President Roh also used the occasion of his visit to Africa to request support for Ban's UNSYG candidacy (ref E). Ban probably hopes that South Korean aid would increase African receptivity to his campaign.

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STRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS AND UN REFORM

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¶4. (C) In late June, Ban attended the inaugural session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, to which South Korea was elected a member, and gave an address that emphasized a few themes representative of his UNSYG candidacy. As a South Korean whose country was defended during the Korean War by the UN Command, he was particularly committed to the ideals of the United Nations, namely peace and stability, development, and human rights and democracy. Seoul supported the establishment of the HRC as an improvement over the UN Human Rights Commission. He emphasized his and Seoul's focus on UN modernization and reform. Finally, despite private demarches to avoid country-specific motions in order to make this first session procedural, Ban publicly took the surprising step to directly criticize North Korean human rights practices and called on Pyongyang to engage in a human rights dialogue with the international community. In the past, Seoul had gone out of its way to abstain or avoid UN votes on North Korean human rights. Ban's HRC speech may have been an attempt for Seoul, and Ban, to take a step toward addressing the criticism that Seoul had turned a blind eye to the human rights situation in North Korea.

¶5. (C) In other fora, Minister Ban and Foreign Ministry officials have insisted that Ban attaches special importance to UN management reform. Ban has told the Ambassador that since his days as First Secretary at the ROK Mission to the United Nations in 1978, he has believed that the UN needed management reform. He pointed to ROK efforts that, he said, were instrumental in strengthening the role of the President of the General Assembly, as another example of his and South Korean efforts to support UN reform.

¶6. (SBU) Key aides to Minister Ban in conversations with the Embassy (ref F) have pointed to Ban's accomplishments in reforming the ROK Foreign Ministry to show his commitment to management reform. Ban strengthened term limits for South Korean ambassadors by reducing the number of missions they could head to two from three or four. He implemented a retirement age of sixty for Ministry officials. He reduced the time allowed foreign service officers returning from posts abroad to look for a new job in the Ministry to four months from the previous one-year period. These, his aides said, were strong decisions that were unpopular among senior MOFAT officers. In addition, Ban initiated weekly press conferences, the only South Korean minister who did this, and this showed confidence in his ability to manage a range of issues, they said. Ban's media presence reportedly earned him a nickname akin to Mr. Teflon (the "slippery eel"), because journalists could ask Ban anything and he was so unflustered.

¶7. (U) In June, the Foreign Ministry sponsored a two-day conference in Seoul titled, "International Seminar on the United Nations in the 21st Century: Challenges and Reform" at which Ban expressed concern over the obstacles to UN management reform. His view was that the key to healing political rifts was genuine dialogue among all the stakeholders. In May, he delivered a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations titled "Restoring the Vitality of the United Nations" in which he insisted that the UN was "overstretched and fatigued" and urged more action to strengthen transparency and accountability. He said the next UNSYG should be a harmonizer who demonstrated leadership by example, as his career demonstrated.

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DEEP EXPERIENCE WITH ALLIANCE AND UNITED NATIONS

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¶8. (SBU) Since entering the Foreign Ministry in 1970, Ban has held key positions focused on the U.S.-Korean relationship and the United Nations. His U.S.-related posts include: Counselor and Consul General in the ROK Embassy in

Washington (1987-1990); Director-General of the North American Affairs Bureau (1990-1992); Minister of the ROK Embassy in Washington (1992-1994); Deputy Minister for Policy Planning (1995); Senior Secretary to the President for Foreign Policy and National Security (1996-1998); Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2000); Adviser to the President for Foreign Policy (2003); and finally Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade starting from 2004. His UN experience includes: First Secretary to the ROK Mission to the United Nations (1978-1980); Director of the UN Division at the Foreign Ministry (1980-1983); Ambassador to Austria (1998-2000) during which time he also served as Chairman of the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (1999); and Ambassador to the United Nations (2001-2002) during which he also served as Chief of Cabinet to the President of the 56th General Assembly of the United Nations (2001).

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DPRK TENSION COULD RAIN ON BAN'S PARADE  
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¶9. (C) North Korean nuclear and missile activities have complicated Ban's attempt to share credit for improving inter-Korean reconciliation. In early July, Ban canceled a visit to Mexico and El Salvador, just a day prior to the DPRK missile launches, due to "outstanding diplomatic issues," that unnamed Ministry officials told reporters was code for DPRK missile launch preparations, deadlocked Six Party Talks, and increased tension with Japan over maritime surveys in the disputed waters near the Liancourt Rocks. UN Security Council internal deliberations over a response to the DPRK missile launch have also cast Ban in an unfavorable position of being involved but not central to UN action because Seoul is one of the few relevant parties not on the Council.

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JAPANESE POSITION UNCLEAR  
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¶10. (C) The increased level of political sparring between Seoul and Tokyo over North Korea and the Liancourt Rocks has intensified the question whether Japan would support or not work against a Ban candidacy. Ban admitted to the Ambassador in April that leaving Japan as the one country he had not visited since declaring his UNSYG ambitions was "conspicuous," especially because Japan was slated to chair the Security Council in October. The appropriate opportunity, he said, had yet to present itself. Some of Ban's senior aides have opined that Japanese leaders might be reluctant to take a public stand against Seoul's candidate to avoid exacerbating anti-Japanese sentiments in Korea. The aides assessed that it would also be hard for Tokyo to vote against Ban, especially if he emerged as the leading Asian candidate.

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BAN: USG AND CHINA ARE THE KEYS TO UNSYG  
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¶11. (C) Ban has emphasized to the Ambassador that all of his interlocutors assessed that the most important voices were from the United States and China. Ban believed that China still wanted an Asian UNSYG, but may have switched its strategy from seeking a consensus candidate to multiple candidates, in case the consensus candidate failed and Asia lost its chance. Therefore, China's official position, according to Ban, was that all four major Asian candidates were qualified and acceptable. Ultimately, Ban opined, the race would hinge on the position of the United States and China. In a July 18 conversation, he for the first time voiced concern that, if the U.S. stayed non-committal much longer, his candidacy could falter (details septel).

COMMENT  
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¶12. (C) "Harmonizer," "consensus-seeker," and even "Mr. Teflon" are the most common descriptions of Ban Ki-moon. A consummate diplomat, Ban now finds himself at the top of his chosen career largely because of his ability to get along with others. This is not to belittle his intellectual depth or his obviously sophisticated understanding of the issues. Rather, it is to point out that Ban is a very skilled diplomat, excellent at forging compromise solutions and maintaining good control over his organization--all in the

service of his political masters. In the Blue House, Ban has worked, got along with and been rapidly promoted by three very different presidents: Kim Young-sam, a hot-tempered conservative with very limited knowledge of most policy issues; Kim Dae-jung, a global political figure, very comfortable in all aspects of foreign policy; and, finally, Roh Moo-hyun, a high-school graduate, newcomer to the international scene, but with strong views and firm conviction.

¶13. (C) A product of elite Korean education, Ban has not held a job outside of the ROK Foreign Ministry system. While Ban's staff emphasize his "reform" credentials, we doubt that he's ever had to face a serious cut in the Ministry's budget, because given the enormous growth in the Korean economy, there has not been a need to trim expenditures or personnel in the Korean Foreign Ministry. Simply put, Ban has not had to deal with restructuring, or have to seriously think about getting rid of large pieces of his organization.

¶14. (C) However, on one credential we have no doubt. This is Ban's view of the United States in general and the USG in particular. Among the most recognized of MOFAT's American experts, Ban has completed three tours in the United States, two in Washington and one in New York. He has also worked on U.S. issues at the Ministry and the Blue House. Ban understands completely American people, values, and government. More important, he is naturally sympathetic to all things American. This is quite typical of well educated Koreans of his age. Their formative experience was the Korean War, and they remain convinced that the U.S. is a benign power, with shared ideals and goals for the region and the world. When we need something from the South Koreans--ranging from sending Korean troops to Iraq to resolving base issues for USFK--we turn to Ban. He has always been sympathetic and helpful. We have no doubt Ban's relations with the USG would be same if he were the UNSYG.

VERSHBOW